

take their parent's military-style assault weapons, designed for no purpose other than murder, and commit an unspeakable atrocity, as happened that sad day in Newtown.

Our country is not a war zone. Our Founding Fathers did not set forth to create a nation where parents walk through school hallways wondering if the doors and windows are thick enough. Or where communities turn on their televisions to tragic news, day after day, and have the same thought: "That could be us next time."

It is long past time for Congress to live up to our responsibility to protect the American people. I urge my colleagues to take up and pass urgently needed, commonsense legislation to reduce gun violence in our society. The American people deserve nothing less.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, on June 7, 1776, Virginian Richard Henry Lee introduced a motion in the Second Continental Congress to declare the 13 American colonies' independence from Great Britain. Four days later, Congress established a committee—the Committee of Five—to draft a statement proclaiming and justifying American independence. The Committee consisted of John Adams (Massachusetts), Benjamin Franklin (Pennsylvania), Thomas Jefferson (Virginia), Robert Livingston (New York), and Roger Sherman (Connecticut) and assigned the duty of writing the first draft to Thomas Jefferson. The Committee left no minutes so we aren't sure how many iterations of the document were drafted before the Committee presented the final version to Congress on June 28, 1776—an action immortalized by the artist John Trumbull in a painting that hangs in the Capitol Rotunda.

On Monday, July 1, 1776, the Committee of the Whole debated the Lee Resolution. Jefferson wrote that they were "exhausted by a debate of nine hours, during which all the powers of the soul had been distended with the magnitude of the object." The Committee of the Whole voted 9-2 to adopt the Lee Resolution. The following day—July 2, 1776—Congress heard the report of the Committee of the Whole and declared the sovereign status of the American colonies. The Declaration of Independence was given its second reading before Congress adjourned for the day. On July 3, 1776, the Declaration received its third reading and final edits. The text's formal adoption was deferred until the following morning—July 4, 1776. That evening, the Committee of Five reconvened to prepare the final "fair copy" of the document, which was delivered to the 29-year-old Irish immigrant printer John Dunlap, with orders from John Hancock to print "broadside" copies. Dunlap worked into the night setting the type and running off 200 or so broadside sheets—now known as the

Dunlap broadsides—which became the first published copies of the Declaration of Independence. Twenty-six of the original Dunlap broadsides—or fragments of them—are extant. Here in Washington, the Library of Congress has two and the National Archives has one. In January 1777, Congress commissioned publisher Mary Katherine Goddard to produce a new broadside of the Declaration of Independence that listed the individuals who signed it.

And so, here we are 238 years later, preparing once again to celebrate the birth of our Nation and the document that proclaimed it. We will have appropriate celebrations from the National Mall to small towns across America. We will gather with families and friends in communities large and small to relax and refresh ourselves. And we will reflect on the blessings of liberty that have been bequeathed to us. We must never take those blessings for granted. Americans have fought and died to defend them and people around the world have fought and died to obtain them.

We cannot calculate what we owe to Thomas Jefferson and the Committee of Five. But, as Abraham Lincoln summoned all Americans in 1863 at Gettysburg, we can dedicate ourselves to the "great task remaining before us . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." The stakes are high, for as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt remarked in his fireside chat on May 26, 1940, "We defend and build a way of life, not for America alone, but for all mankind." That is our unique and solemn responsibility as Americans, and our cherished privilege.

I wish all of my colleagues, my fellow Marylanders, and all Americans a happy and safe Fourth of July.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF FREEDOM SUMMER AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I wish to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and to talk for a few minutes about how Senators can work together to make this a more perfect Union and guarantee equal justice under the law to all Americans.

Freedom Summer was a campaign in Mississippi to register Black voters during the summer of 1964. In 1964, most Black voters were disenfranchised by law or practice in Mississippi, notwithstanding the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified in 1870. The 15th Amendment provides that "the rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by . . . any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

On January 23, 1964, the States ratified the 24th Amendment to the Constitution, which provides that "the

rights of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other [Federal] election . . . shall not be denied or abridged . . . by any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax."

The Freedom Summer voting rights initiative was led by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, with the support of the Council of Federated Organizations, COFO, which included the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, referred to in this preamble as the CORE, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SCLC.

Thousands of students and activists participated in 2-week orientation sessions in preparation for the voter registration drive in Mississippi. In 1962, at 6.7 percent of the State's Black population, Mississippi had one of the lowest percentages of Black registered voters in the country.

Tragically, three civil rights volunteers lost their lives in their attempts to secure voting rights for Blacks. Andrew Goodman was a White 20-year-old anthropology major from Queens College who volunteered for the Freedom Summer project. James Chaney was a 21-year-old Black man from Meridian, MS, who became a civil rights activist, joining the CORE in 1963 to work on voter registration and education. Michael "Mickey" Schwerner was a 24-year-old White man from Brooklyn, NY, who was a CORE field secretary in Mississippi and a veteran of the civil rights movement.

On the morning of June 21, 1964, the three men left the CORE office in Meridian, MS, and set out for Longdale, MS, where they were to investigate the recent burning of the Mount Zion Methodist Church, a Black church that had been functioning as a freedom school to promote education and voter registration. The three civil rights workers were beaten, shot, and killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan, after being turned over by local police.

The national uproar in response to these brave men's deaths, which occurred shortly before enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, helped build the momentum and national consensus necessary to bring about passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

So as we celebrate the anniversaries of these landmarks pieces of civil rights legislation, we are reminded that there is more work to be done. As former Senator Ted Kennedy used to say, "Civil rights is the great unfinished business of America."

One year ago this week the Supreme Court issued its decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which struck down section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, invalidating the coverage formula that determines which jurisdictions are subject to the preclearance provisions of the act.

Congress must act to reverse the erroneous decision by the Supreme Court which overturned several important

precedents in a fit of judicial activism. As much as we wish it wasn't so, racism has not disappeared from America and there continue to be individuals and groups who would use our voting system to deliberately minimize the rights of minority voters. Congress overwhelmingly reauthorized the Voting Rights Act in 2006 after building an extensive record that made a compelling case for the continued need to protect minority voters from discrimination. I strongly agree with Justice Ginsburg's dissent that 'in truth, the evolution of voting discrimination into more subtle second-generation barriers is powerful evidence that a remedy as effective as preclearance remains vital to protect minority voting rights and prevent backsliding.' I am deeply disappointed that the Court put voting rights in jeopardy by ignoring reality and disregarding the power of Congress to enforce the 15th Amendment of the Constitution by appropriate legislation.

I am pleased that the Judiciary Committee held a hearing this week on potential legislative responses to the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*, and I hope Congress can take up and pass a legislative fix before the midterm elections.

Congress should also take up and pass the Democracy Restoration Act, DRA, S. 2235, which I have introduced. The Democracy Restoration Act would restore voting rights in Federal elections to approximately 5.8 million citizens who have been released from prison and are back living in their communities.

After the Civil War, Congress enacted and the States ratified the 15th Amendment, which provides that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Unfortunately, many States passed laws during the Jim Crow period after the Civil War to make it more difficult for newly freed slaves to vote in elections. Such laws included poll taxes, literacy tests, and disenfranchisement measures.

Some disenfranchisement measures applied to misdemeanor convictions and in practice could result in lifetime disenfranchisement, even for individuals that successfully reintegrated into their communities as law-abiding citizens.

Shortly thereafter Congress enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which swept away numerous State laws and procedures that had denied African Americans and other minorities their constitutional right to vote. For example, the act outlawed the use of literacy or history tests that voters had to pass before registering to vote or casting their ballot.

The act specifically prohibits States from imposing any "voting qualifica-

tion or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." Congress overwhelmingly reauthorized the act in 2006, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush. Congress is now working on legislation to revitalize the VRA after recent Supreme Court decisions curtailed its reach.

In 2014, I am concerned that there are still several areas where the legacy of Jim Crow laws and State disenfranchisement statutes lead to unfairness in Federal elections. First, State laws governing the restoration of voting rights vary widely throughout the country, such that persons in some States can easily regain their voting rights, while in other States persons effectively lose their right to vote permanently. Second, these State disenfranchisement laws have a disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities. Third, this patchwork of State laws results in the lack of a uniform standard for eligibility to vote in Federal elections, and leads to an unfair disparity and unequal participation in Federal elections based solely on residence. Finally, studies indicate that former prisoners who have voting rights restored are less likely to re-offend, and disenfranchisement hinders their rehabilitation and reintegration into their community.

In 35 States, convicted individuals may not vote while they are on parole. In 11 States, a conviction can result in lifetime disenfranchisement. Several States require prisoners to seek discretionary pardons from Governors, or action by the parole or pardon board, in order to regain their right to vote. Several States deny the right to vote to individuals convicted of certain misdemeanors. States are slowly moving to repeal or loosen many of these barriers to voting for ex-prisoners.

An estimated 5,850,000 citizens of the United States, or about 1 in 40 adults in the United States, currently cannot vote as a result of a felony conviction. Of the 5,850,000 citizens barred from voting, only 25 percent are in prison. By contrast, 75 percent of the disenfranchised reside in their communities while on probation or parole after having completed their sentences. Approximately 2,600,000 citizens who have completed their sentences remain disenfranchised due to restrictive State laws. In six states—Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia—more than 7 percent of the total population is disenfranchised.

Studies show that a growing number of African-American men, for example, will be disenfranchised at some point in their life, partly due to mandatory minimum sentencing laws that have a disproportionate impact on minorities. Latino citizens are disproportionately disenfranchised as well.

Congress has addressed part of this problem by enacting the Fair Sentencing Act to partially reduce the sen-

tencing disparity between crack cocaine and powder cocaine convictions. Congress is now considering legislation that would more broadly revise mandatory sentencing procedures and create a fairer system of sentencing. While I welcome these steps, I believe that Congress should take stronger action now to remedy this particular problem.

The legislation would restore voting rights to prisoners after their release from incarceration. It requires that prisons receiving Federal funds notify people about their right to vote in Federal elections when they are leaving prison, sentenced to probation, or convicted of a misdemeanor.

The legislation is narrowly crafted to apply to Federal elections, and retains the States' authorities to generally establish voting qualifications. This legislation is consistent with congressional authority under the Constitution and voting rights statutes.

I am pleased that this legislation has been endorsed by a large coalition of public interest organizations, including civil rights and reform organizations; religious and faith-based organizations; and law enforcement and criminal justice organizations.

In particular I want to thank the Brennan Center for Justice, the ACLU, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the NAACP for their work on this legislation.

This legislation is designed to reduce recidivism rates and help reintegrate ex-prisoners back into society. When prisoners are released, they are expected to obey the law, get a job, and pay taxes as they are rehabilitated and reintegrated into their community. With these responsibilities and obligations of citizenship should also come the rights of citizenship, including the right to vote.

In 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Second Chance Act into law, after overwhelming approval and strong bipartisan support in Congress. The legislation expanded the Prison Re-Entry Initiative, by providing job training, placement services, transitional housing, drug treatment, medical care, and faith-based mentoring.

At the signing ceremony, President Bush said: "We believe that even those who have struggled with a dark past can find brighter days ahead. One way we act on that belief is by helping former prisoners who have paid for their crimes. We help them build new lives as productive members of our society."

The Democracy Restoration Act is fully consistent with the goals of the Second Chance Act, as Congress and the States seek to reduce recidivism rates, strengthen the quality of life in our communities and make them safer, and reduce the burden on taxpayers.

More recently, in a February 2014 speech, Attorney General Eric Holder called on elected officials to reexamine disenfranchisement statutes and enact reforms to restore voting rights.

I urge Congress to continue the fight to protect and expand civil rights in

this country, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and as we strive to make this a more perfect union.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AWARENESS DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I wish to speak on behalf of our service men and women suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Tomorrow—June 27—is National Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day, so designated by the U.S. Senate in a unanimous action 2 years ago. I am calling on all of my colleagues in this body to redouble our efforts to help veterans and servicemembers who are struggling with PTSD each and every day. I remain committed to provide all necessary assistance to people who have this problem as the result of their faithful military service because it is one of the solemn obligations we have as a nation. For this reason I supported Senator HEITKAMP's bi-partisan resolution designating June as National Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—PTSD—Awareness Month.

With the military drawdown currently underway, I am concerned that our Nation will not adequately address the PTSD-related issues that many of our veterans and servicemembers face. I find it deeply troubling that, on average, 22 veterans commit suicide every day. Furthermore, veterans who have post-traumatic stress are at greater risk for drug abuse and alcoholism. The abuse of these substances often amounts to a form of a self-medication because the servicemember or veteran is unable or unwilling to seek help.

I strongly believe that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day is an important step in highlighting these issues. Our challenge is to help every veteran suffering from these invisible wounds seek help and cope with their very real injury. There is a perceived stigma that makes veterans reluctant to seek help and feeds negative perceptions which can cause employers not to hire veterans. Educating veterans and the public about this affliction and the support networks available will bring to light a very real and deadly epidemic among servicemembers. Too often we say "thank you" to servicemembers and veterans without really knowing what we are thanking them for, because we don't bother to understand their struggles. Addressing this disconnect would make a world of difference in helping this population mitigate the effects of post-traumatic stress.

The work being done today to address this issue proves that post-traumatic stress does not have to be a permanently disabling condition. Within my own State of Maryland, organizations such as Fort Detrick's Army Medical Research & Materiel Command are making amazing advances in developing post-traumatic stress treatments

that were unimaginable just a few years ago. As for present treatments, the Warrior Canine Connection is an excellent example of an organization that is helping veterans here and now. This organization, located in Brookeville, provides therapeutic working dogs to veterans and servicemembers, and it also conducts research that strives to further improve upon the positive effects that these service animals have on the veterans and servicemembers. The Warrior Canine Connection has helped countless veterans relieve the symptoms of post-traumatic stress, enabling them to regain their status as healthy and productive members of our society.

I am not at all surprised that these servicemembers and veterans have bounced back wonderfully after being treated for their post-traumatic stress. If a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine is able to excel on the battlefield, then I see no reason why that same person should not be able to excel in the classroom, in a hospital, or in the boardroom. I refuse to believe that our veterans and servicemembers are "damaged goods" because of their military service.

One only needs to look at our history to see that our society benefits greatly when we provide our veterans and servicemembers with the assistance they need to transition successfully to civilian life. During World War II, American servicemembers encountered some of the most difficult combat conditions in human history. Yet when World War II veterans returned home, did they become a burden to their nation because of those combat experiences? Not at all. Returning World War II veterans spearheaded the work that made our country more prosperous than it had ever been. Veterans can be the engine to a great economy that sustains a flourishing middle class. I believe World War II veterans were able to succeed in the civilian workforce because after the war, they returned to a society that understood and genuinely respected their military service.

This week I had the privilege of visiting the Veterans Health Care System in Baltimore, MD. America cannot break our promise to those who have sacrificed so much to protect our great Nation. We have seen bipartisan progress toward correcting the systemic problems facing our veterans' health care system, and I am encouraged by the additional staff and resources being deployed in Baltimore. Most Maryland veterans are receiving quality health care at world-class facilities close to home. But the wounds inflicted by this national breach of trust will take more time to heal as we renew and fulfill our commitment to care for the health and well-being of our veterans.

I am continually in awe of the extraordinary men and women serving at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center who make it their daily mission to provide the highest level of

support to our wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers and their families. A testament to their commitment is the Department of Defense Deployment Health Clinical Center in Bethesda, MD, which has developed an intensive, 3-week, multi-disciplinary treatment program called The Specialized Care Program. This program is designed for servicemembers experiencing PTSD or experiencing difficulties readjusting to life upon redeployment after serving in Operations IRAQ or ENDURING FREEDOM. This program is for patients who have had other treatments for PTSD, or perhaps depression, but who continue to experience symptoms that interfere with their ability to function.

In light of the upcoming July 4 holiday, providing assistance to veterans who have served our Nation so diligently must be a priority. As we celebrate our Independence Day, we must also address the needs of those who have defended our liberty and have allowed it to thrive. Without the men and women who fought for the United States' freedom in 1776 and those who bravely do so today, our country simply would not exist. With this in mind, we as Americans ought to support our veterans to the best of our abilities and present them with the necessary assistance and resources they may require. Whether we succeed in this endeavor will be a significant measure of our Nation's fidelity towards our veterans and its moral character. I am committed to making sure this population receives treatment for post-traumatic stress, should they need it. The United States is the strongest nation in the world because of our veterans and servicemembers. We owe it to bring them back home not just in body, but in mind and spirit, as well.

RWANDA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, rising from the ashes of the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan people can be proud of the progress their country has made over the past two decades. Through reconciliation and resilience, Rwanda has entered a new phase of economic growth and is working to protect civilians in other countries through its vital contributions to global peacekeeping missions. The world has cheered these successes, but today we have cause for concern.

To cement its legacy as a world leader and model for development, there is in Rwanda today a clear need to ensure space for a thriving civil society—a hallmark of any democracy. I am deeply troubled by reports of shrinking space for dissenting voices. Rwanda's domestic human rights movement has been profoundly constrained by a combination of intimidation and stigmatization, threats, harassment, arbitrary arrests and detentions, infiltration, and administrative obstacles. The government's actions to censor domestic and international human rights